

## **The Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme: an industry led response to environmental and safety concerns**

Given the increasing volume of freight and fleet traffic that is needed to serve the UK economy, influencing improvements in road safety and environmental performance will surely be fundamental to any ongoing efforts. Last month Mayor of London Boris Johnson announced the UK's first 'Safer Lorry Scheme,' which will include a London-wide ban on any lorry over 3.5 tonnes not fitted with basic safety equipment when it is introduced later this year.

Launched by Transport for London (TfL) in 2008, the Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS) is designed to improve commercial vehicle fleet standards, and safety is a fundamental aspect of the initiative. Indeed some parallels can be made between the proposed equipment required under the new 'Safer Lorry Scheme' and the safety features that must be added to vehicle fleets in order to attain FORS bronze accreditation. These include fitting side under-run guards to protect cyclists from being dragged under the wheels of a vehicle in the event of a collision, as well as Class VI mirrors that give the driver a better view around his/her vehicle.

Bronze accreditation is the first of three levels under the FORS scheme, which is designed to bring safety, environmental and efficiency benefits for fleet operators by encouraging the adoption of best practice industry standards. Progression to silver requires operators to dramatically improve the overall safety of fleet vehicles by fitting additional safety equipment. To achieve gold, the highest accolade, operators must demonstrate that previous measures and interventions have worked through data that verifies improved performance and reduced collisions.

The three FORS accreditation levels are designed to encourage operators to continuously improve road safety performance. The scheme was first introduced as a key project arising from the London Freight Plan – which aims to coordinate the role of freight in London's growth – and is in line with the Mayor's Transport Strategy. Earlier this year, TfL announced it was expanding the scheme nationally and appointed AECOM as concessionaire to manage, operate and grow FORS.

The decision behind this nationwide roll-out is largely due to the scheme's popularity. With 65 percent of FORS-accredited operators now based outside London, it has grown beyond TfL's remit. The focus for AECOM and its partners, the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) and specialist fleet services support organisation Fleet Source, will be around building on past successes to convince additional fleet operators – and their clients – that FORS accreditation makes sound business sense. Key to the nationwide expansion of FORS will be to achieve buy-in from both fleet operators and the clients they serve.

A major reason for the scheme's successful uptake in London has undoubtedly been client driven, with businesses now using FORS in contracts with their supply chain. A growing number of companies require fleet operators to demonstrate a commitment to sustainable fleet activities in order to tender for work with them. In particular, the construction industry has embraced the scheme, with companies including Mace,

Laing O'Rourke and Crossrail using FORS as a method to manage work related road safety in contracts.

Uptake of FORS among this sector was buoyed by the Construction Logistics and Cycle Safety (CLOCS) initiative. CLOCS was established in 2012 following an independent review commissioned by TfL of the construction sector's transport activities to understand the causes of collisions between construction vehicles and cyclists. Between 2008 and 2013, more than half of cyclist fatalities in London involved a heavy goods vehicle, with a large number of these construction vehicles. The initiative brings together developers, construction companies, operators, vehicle manufacturers and regulatory bodies to ensure a road safety culture is embedded across the construction industry. Due to CLOCS, more than 25 major construction firms now require FORS accreditation as part of their contracts.

FORS accreditation can also be built into planning conditions, enabling local authorities to ensure best practice standards are met by the entire supply chain involved in their development projects. FORS provides an important channel for closer engagement with fleet operators – often a notoriously hard-to-reach audience. This would allow public sector bodies to build support for further opportunities to reduce the impact of fleet services on the road network.

Data collected since the launch of FORS highlights the safety impact the scheme has had on London's roads. FORS accredited operators are likely to achieve increased levels of legal compliance, which reinforces safe transport operations. Over three-quarters (76 percent) are less likely to be involved in licence or insurance offences, 64 percent are less likely to be involved in Most Serious Infringements (MSIs) and half are less likely to be involved in driver hours offences.

Key to the improvements highlighted in this data has been to motivate behavioural change. FORS recognises that behavioural change is as important as the safety equipment added to vehicles in order to gain accreditation. Under FORS, drivers are required to complete training. More than 10,000 drivers have taken part in the scheme's Safe Urban Driving course, which is the first accredited training course in the UK to include on-road cycle training. As part of this practical training session, drivers will ride bikes to experience first-hand a cyclist's view of the road. The scheme's ongoing efforts to improve fleet safety were recognised last year when it won a Prince Michael International Road Safety Award.

While safety is a fundamental aspect of FORS, reducing the impact of fleet operations on the environment is another important objective of the scheme. It is aligned to the Mayor's Air Quality Strategy, which sets out a framework for improving London's air quality, including measures for reducing emissions from transport. Compliance with the FORS standards is designed to help improve air quality by reducing emissions of local air pollutants and CO<sub>2</sub> caused by fleet services. To progress through the accreditation levels, operators must monitor their fuel use, as well as provide evidence of reduced emissions caused by their fleet. Fuel accounts for over a third of the average fleet operator's running costs, and with operators at the mercy of fluctuating fuel prices, measures that help reduce fuel usage will surely be welcomed.

There is no other single scheme that helps fleet operators not only comply with all legal requirements relating to safety, efficiency and the environment but also helps to raise the bar and improve standards in each of these areas. Unlike other recognition schemes, it requires evidence of performance against the many regulatory requirements facing the industry. By achieving FORS accreditation, operators can be reassured that their fleet meets all legislative requirements, simplifying an often arduous process. This added benefit of FORS has been well-received by the fleet community in the past and is another reason for the scheme's national roll-out. With a rising number of operators seeking UK-wide accreditation for their national fleets, the scheme had already started to grow organically outside London before the expansion was announced.

While uptake to date has largely involved the construction and aggregates industries, it is recognised that the principles of FORS are equally applicable to other sectors. The scheme is actually available to all companies that operate fleets, including coaches, mini-buses and vans. Attracting interest from these industries will be a focus going forward, helping to raise standards and improve road safety among an additional group of road users.

FORS has experienced steady growth over the past few years and has accredited more than 210,000 vehicles since it was established. The scheme's nationwide roll-out over the next year marks an exciting milestone in its progression. TfL has already committed to remaining a champion of FORS as the scheme expands, and will be represented on the newly established FORS governance board. With the UK experiencing an influx in infrastructure development, FORS has the potential to influence the performance of an ever-growing number of fleet operators required to serve the country's towns and cities. No doubt the public bodies responsible for the country's roads outside the capital will be watching closely as the scheme evolves.

Interest in the scheme is not limited to the UK. FORS has even received attention from a number of European cities, including Paris and Poznan, highlighting the potential for international expansion. Key to the scheme's success will be preserving its founding principles that have undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the ongoing quest to improve road safety in London. Its national expansion will surely be welcome news for road users across the rest of the country.

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